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Deborah Barnard

Tennessee Technological University, dbarnard@tntech.edu

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Being Ghetto: The Hara as Heterotopia in Judeo-Tunisian Literature

Debbie Barnard

Tennessee Technological University
Cookeville, Tennessee, USA

Abstract

The Hara, or ghetto, is a place that distinguishes its inhabitants from other religious and cultural groups, acting as a spatial indicator of their difference. When Foucault's theory of heterotopia is applied, the Hara becomes a hybrid, a place simultaneously of crisis and of deviation. In Albert Memmi's *La statue de sel*, the protagonist experiences the Hara as antagonistic, or as a dystopia. In Nine Moati's *Les belles de Tunis*, the protagonist experiences the Hara as a utopia.

In his work, *Des espaces autres*, Michel Foucault states that the great obsession of the twentieth century is space:

We are in the epoch of the simultaneous; we are in the epoch of juxtaposition, in the epoch of the close and the far, of the side-by-side, and of the dispersed. We are at a moment where the world is experiencing, I believe, not so much a grand life that will develop across the ages, as a network that links different points, crisscrossing to form a web.^{[1], [2]}

It is this crisscrossed web's relation to society that interests Foucault. He traces the development of mankind's relationship to space, making a careful distinction among, 1) *la localisation* (localization), or the relationship between man and the medieval hierarchy of *les lieux* (places); 2) *l'étendue* (expanse), or the corollary of Galileo's theories of planetary motion that removed Earth from the hierarchy of places and made localization moot; and 3) *l'emplacement* (location), or the contemporary concept of the function of proximity between different points or elements of population.^[3] Foucault specifies that for people, the question of location is a demographic one that asks not only whether or not there will be enough space for all mankind, but also how different locations will interact and for what purposes they will be used: "We are in an era where space presents itself to us in terms of the relationships of locations."^[4] Nowhere is Foucault's statement more evident than in francophone African literature's representations of the city. In these works, the city is the location that allows the literature to take place; only in the city is there a large concentration of *emplacements*, each corresponding to a political, cultural, or economic subset of the population. The city, as a focal point of these subsets, is the mosaic that connects European to autochthon, villager to urbanite, wealthy to destitute, powerful to disenfranchised, and allows postcolonial reality to be presented in all its complexity. The role of the city in francophone literature is an important one, for it may be the only setting in which these *emplacements* and their demographic subsets coexist. In the city, characters encounter the Other, and become aware of their own Otherness:

The primordial role played by the antimony of sameness/otherness in the elaboration of the character is closely tied to the importance of geographic and family origins in African societies, even in the most Westernized urban areas. Without a doubt, this aspect of individual identity has lost much of its value in Western societies, marked by geographic mobility and the dissolution of family structures. This is not the case in sub-Saharan Africa, where belonging to a place and a lineage constitute an important factor of recognition, and the basis of all sorts of solidarity. Myths of inception are still relevant, associating the inauguration of a village with that of a lineage. However, a person can no longer define himself simply by birth: History broke those ties, making all people strangers to themselves. The relation is thus refractory: looking at each other, the space and the outsider find each other mutually unknown and fundamentally Other.^[5]

The colonial city, then, is a space of the Other; claimed, administered, re-configured by the colonizer, the colonial city flaunts the dominant, powerful Otherness of the European, while simultaneously making the colonized aware of his own intrinsic Otherness. Moreover, for the autochthon, the traditional markers of identity—family, village of origin, even language—are erased in the urban setting, to be replaced by an untenable, imposed cultural identity that shatters the familiar and marginalizes him within his own *emplacement*.

Tunisia's capital, Tunis, is an excellent example of this space of otherness; in francophone Tunisian literature, Tunis is an *hantise*, an obsession that crystallizes and mirrors the marginality of its inhabitants, constantly appearing in forms that surpass the function of mere setting. In Arabic, the words that designate the nation and the capital are one and the same, Tunis, making the capital ever present in the Tunisian mind, whether the individual citizen lives there or not. Many works associate Tunis with rupture: rupture with one's cultural identity, as in the case of Albert Memmi's *La statue de sel*; rupture with one's homeland, as in Michel Valensi's *L'empreinte*; rupture with one's sense of justice, as in Gilbert Naccache's *Cristal*. Not simply the center of government and economic activity, during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Tunis was a nexus of seemingly incompatible cultures, nationalities, and religions. Traditionally, pre-independence Tunis was divided into three distinct zones: the Medina, characterized by labyrinthine streets and centuries-old Arab architecture; the Ville franque, made up of the neighborhoods built by colonizers under first Ottoman, then French, rule and characterized by wide avenues and European-style architecture; and the Hara, or the Jewish quarter, characterized by crowded, narrow streets and squalor. The three zones were religiously and culturally specific, with the cultural status of each area marking its respective inhabitants for life, inflicting upon them a social standing that was difficult to overcome. For example, the Ville franque was the domain of the European and Westernized populations where all Europeans, Christians or

Jewish, as well as the Muslim elite, dwelt. Muslim Tunisians and poorer Europeans, such as the Maltese and Russian communities, inhabited the Medina; the Hara was reserved for Jews, but the poorest Muslims and Christians could also be found there. These groups were integrated, coming into contact with each other in the course of everyday life, but they were not assimilated, for each group maintained its own cultural specificities and differences without conforming to a dominant cultural structure.[6] For the Jewish population the situation was even more complex, since it was divided into two culturally distinct groups, the Touansa and the Grana. The Touansa (literally, “the Tunisians”) were the descendants of the first Jewish immigrants in Tunisia, who arrived around 586 CE. The Grana (or “Livournais”) were Sephardic Jews from Italy who formed commercial ties with Tunis during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, eventually settling there. Under Muslim law, the Jews held a special status, that of *dhimmi*, or “people of the book.” They were allowed to practice Judaism, but were subjected to various restrictions—a dress code, an annual tax, higher import and export tariffs, a restriction on owning real estate—that carried a minimum penalty of corporal punishment for all breaches.[7] These restrictions were not applied equally between the two groups of Jews. The Touansa, as subjects of the ruler of Tunis, were required to adhere to all of the restrictions, while the Grana, who were often foreign citizens simply working in Tunis, were not required to abide by many of the restrictions imposed on the Touansa. Most importantly, the Grana could own property, which meant that although the earliest groups of Grana that settled in Tunis had been forced to live in the Hara, subsequent arrivals were allowed to set up residence wherever they chose, usually in the wealthier neighborhoods of the Ville franque. Once the ban on owning property was removed in 1861,[8] wealthier Touansa left the squalor of the Hara for the luxury of the Ville franque, but they were not able to leave behind their origins. Through Westernization, the Jews of Tunisia became assimilated into the culture of the colonizers, but they were not accepted. Instead of being sympathetic to the situation of Tunisia’s Jews, the Europeans became defiant towards them, as Paul Lapie explains: “The young Jew who becomes civilized is in general arrogant: he’s aware of what he’s accomplished, and is vain about it. Anti-Semitism is only latent in Tunis. It will grow as long as the Europeans think that the Israelites are the most dangerous of competitors.”[9], [10]

As Paul Sebag reminds us, for the non-Jewish population of Tunis, there was no difference between Touansa and Grana; they were all Jews. It is within the Jewish community itself that the difference becomes important: “As they evolved, the Touansa became closer to the Grana, who had long ago adopted European customs and habits. Unions between Touansa and Grana became more frequent. This form of mixed marriage was sought out by the Touansa, because to marry a Grana represented a social promotion for them.”[11] Having been born in the Hara, or being a Touansa, became a social blemish that was difficult to erase. At the same time, however, the Hara was both a refuge for the Touansa, and a characterizing space, seminal to their cultural identity: “It was true that only the ghetto had allowed an intense communal life, and had defended the Jew against internal and external erosion. One can understand, in this sense, the envious and somewhat silly admiration of Western communities for the Hara of Tunis.”[12] The Hara was a hybrid of ghetto and enclave; a space where

the Touansa were forced to live, first by law, then by economics, it was also a community that offered cultural and emotional safety to its inhabitants.

We find, then, that in Judeo-Tunisian literature, the Hara functions not so much as a ghetto in the traditional European sense, but as an example of Foucault's concept of heterotopia. For Foucault, heterotopias are:

real places that exist, and that are part of the very fabric of society, and that are a type of contra-*emplacement*, a type of utopia brought into being in which the actual *emplacements*, all the other real *emplacements* that one can find at the interior of a culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted, the type of places that are beyond all places, even though they actually can be found.[13]

Foucault then elucidates six principles of the heterotopia:

First principle: All cultures have heterotopias, and although there is no universal form of heterotopia, there are two basic types, those of crisis and those of deviation. [...]

Second principle: A society can change or modify the function of a heterotopia over the course of time. [...]

Third principle: A heterotopia has the power to juxtapose in the same real space different places that are inherently incompatible. [...]

Fourth principle: heterotopias are linked to different moments in time, to "heterochronies." [...]

Fifth principle: heterotopias presuppose a system of opening and closing that simultaneously isolates them and makes them penetrable. Either departure is restricted (prisons, forts) or it's necessary to undergo rites and purifications to access them. Or there are heterotopias that appear to be open to all, but that really aren't. [...]

Sixth principle: heterotopias have a function that makes them different from other space.[14]

It is the sixth principle that we will examine first, since it poses the most fundamental question: What function does the Hara have that makes it different from other space? As it will become evident further on in this study, the Hara is a characterizing place, a place that makes the Touansa Touansa; it distinguishes them from the other religious and cultural groups living in Tunis and acts as a spatial indicator of their difference. In Judeo-Tunisian literature, the Hara is both hostile and propitious, a space that isolates and unites. Within the larger body of Judeo-Tunisian literature, Albert Memmi's and Nine Moati's works present an important perspective on Tunisia's Jewish community in general, and on the impact of the Hara, in particular. For example, Albert

Memmi's first novel, *La statue de sel*, chronicles the life of Alexandre Mordekhai Benillouche, a Touansa born in poverty, whose life changes when he is awarded a full scholarship to Tunis' prestigious Lycée Carnot. Benillouche's French education drives a wedge between him and the indigenous Tunisian world of his childhood, alienating him from his family and their way of life. At the same time, however, the fact that he is Touansa prevents him from being assimilated into the bourgeois, Westernized world of the *lycée*. Benillouche's efforts to resolve his marginality are in vain, and at the end of the novel he leaves Tunis, a refugee of both the communities into which he can never be assimilated. Moati's novel, *Les belles de Tunis*, also chronicles the lives of people from the Hara, but this time through three generations of the same family. An historical novel, *Les belles de Tunis* opens with Myriam's birth in the Hara just before Tunisia becomes a French protectorate. As the work progresses, the focus shifts first to Myriam's daughter, Maya, then to her granddaughter, Marie, all the while detailing the social, political, and economic changes happening in Tunis.

These two works present fundamentally different images of Tunis, and very different images of the Hara. *La statue de sel* and *Les belles de Tunis* both focus on the diversity of *tunisoise* society; the heroines of Moati's novel encounter the same cross-section of Europeans, Muslims, Grana, and Touansa that Memmi's hero does. For Myriam and her family, however, these rencontres are much more positive than they are for Benillouche. Even though the Hara of *La statue de sel* has many of the characteristics of Foucault's heterotopia, it does not correspond to his original description of the concept, in which he calls a heterotopia, "a real utopia that really exists."^[15] Whereas Memmi's depiction of the Hara posits it as more of a dystopia, Moati's depiction is an example of an idealized society along the lines of Foucault's definition. The main characters of these novels, for the most part, experience Tunis in relation to their situation as inhabitants of the Hara, or ghetto, of Tunis. In Albert Memmi's work, the Hara reflects the aspects of his character's personality of which he is both ashamed and proud. In Nine Moati's work, conversely, the Hara is a benevolent space whose negative aspects are, in the end, propitious for her characters. As we will see, just as the Hara itself is a hybrid of both major categories of heterotopia that Foucault discusses, the Hara as literary place does not always fulfill all six functions of heterotopia that Foucault presents. Which principles it meets are determined by whether or not the protagonists of each novel view it as a source of antagonism, as Benillouche does, or as a source of synergy, as does Myriam.

First, though, we must examine Foucault's first principle to determine which of the two larger categories of heterotopia applies to the Hara. This is especially problematic because of the way that the Hara was established: According to legend, it was a chosen space, solicited by the Jewish community. The origins of the Hara are shrouded in mystery. The word "hara" has two possible sources. It could be a shortening of the Arabic word "haraouna," or "quarter, neighborhood," or it could come from the word "hara," that means "four" in the Tunisian dialect. Legend states that originally, Jews were not allowed to live within the walls of Tunis; they entered the city to conduct their business during the day, but had to return to their village outside the city walls at nightfall. Because the village was unprotected, it was often robbed and plundered by

bandits from the surrounding countryside. The elders of the Jewish community begged a Muslim advisor to the king to intercede on their behalf and allow them to move into Tunis. When the advisor said that it would be impossible to allow the entire community to move in, the Jewish elders replied that they only wanted permission for four families, or “a hara,” to be allowed residence in the city.[16] A hara of families was allowed to move in, and the area given to them was called “the Hara.” This legend would place the creation of the Hara during the late tenth and early eleventh centuries CE.[17] A large majority of Tunis’ Jewish population lived in the Hara up until the 1960s, when it was torn down because most of its buildings were condemned.[18]

The fact that the Jewish community petitioned for a space to be assigned to them makes it difficult to define the Hara by either of Foucault’s two categories of heterotopia. According to Foucault, the two principal groups of heterotopias are those of crisis and those of deviation. He defines heterotopias of crisis as, “privileged, sacred or forbidden spaces reserved for individuals who are in a state of crisis with regard to the society in which they live.”[19] The Hara was, at its founding, certainly a heterotopia of crisis. Although it is unclear why Jews were excluded from living in Tunis while they were allowed to live in other large, Muslim-controlled cities of North Africa,[20] the fact that they were denied the protection offered by dwelling within the city walls clearly placed them in crisis. Again, however, this crisis differs from the examples that Foucault cites. For Foucault, those in crisis are so designated by the society in which they live: “teenagers, menstruating women, women giving birth, old people.”[21] These criteria are basal; they can be altered or avoided only by drastic physical events (usually death or severe illness). The request for the creation of a Hara in Tunis was prompted by a more subtle crisis, based not on a corporeal condition, but on religious and cultural attributes that were not common to all people. Both groups—Foucault’s individuals with their physical difference and the Jewish community with its cultural differences—are considered in crisis by their respective societies. The Jewish crisis, however, emanated not from the Jewish community’s physical condition, as the crises cited by Foucault do, but by a modality problematized by the society of which the Jewish community was a part. This difference is slight, but important. Foucault’s qualities of crisis are normal by virtue of their commonality: Occasional exceptions notwithstanding, all people experience adolescence, all women menstruate, all people grow old. Tied to this aspect of commonality, however, is the quality of temporariness: No one is a permanent teenager; women do not menstruate all the time; people are not always old. The inevitability of these conditions of crisis is tempered by their impermanence. Those deemed in crisis by the physical conditions that Foucault denotes move out of crisis with society, thus exiting their respective heterotopias. This is not true for those whose crises are prompted not by physical, but rather by cultural, differences, like the Jewish community. The characteristic of being Jewish is permanent, and somewhat exclusive, since not everyone is Jewish, and although one can convert, conversion is seldom enough to change society’s perception. For example, during the Almohade dynasty, non-Muslims were given the choice between conversion to Islam or death. Those Jews who did convert were suspected of insincerity: “Since there was doubt about the sincerity of their conversion, the [converted] Jews became the object of an active surveillance, and to make things

easier, they were required to wear a distinctive sign and special clothing to keep them from being confused with Muslims of long-standing.”[22] As Jean-Paul Sartre reminds us, “The Jew is in a state of Jewishness because he lives in a society that considers him a Jew.”[23] Quite simply, the Jews in Tunisia did not have a normal relationship with the society in which they lived, implying some sort of social deviance; therefore, the Hara cannot be classified categorically as a heterotopia of crisis, but must also be considered a heterotopia of deviation.

Within the context of Tunisian society, Foucault’s second category of heterotopias, those of deviation, also seems applicable to the Hara. Foucault defines heterotopias of deviation as those spaces in which society confines people who are deviant according to its standards. For Foucault, the most common heterotopias of deviation are rest homes, psychiatric clinics, retirement homes, and prisons.[24] As we have already seen, Tunisian society traditionally has not allowed for religious difference in its consideration of culture; predictably, then, Jews, as non-Muslims, were considered “deviant.” Here again, though, the Jewish community’s request that they be given the Hara makes the classification of the space as a heterotopia of deviation problematic. Psychiatric clinics, prisons, and even rest homes are spaces to which people rarely confine themselves voluntarily. Moreover, this elective aspect of the Hara places it in sharp contrast with the ghettos of Europe, and even Morocco, where Jews were required to live. Another important difference between the Hara and the European ghettos and Moroccan *mellahs* was the absence of gates; Jews were not locked in the Hara at night: “The Hara spread out. All the Israelites had to do to outgrow the medieval limits of the Hara was rent, even at very high prices, new homes near the ones that they already occupied. This was especially easy because the Jewish quarter was never surrounded by walls that would restrict its growth.”[25] The quarter had no gates, so its inhabitants could circulate freely anywhere in the city, at any time. Compared to other Jewish quarters, the Hara was a singular space that allowed its inhabitants protection and freedom of movement, simultaneously. In fact, the Jewish community chose to leave the Hara at least twice after its establishment. For example, in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the persecution of the fundamentalist Almohade dynasty caused the Jewish community to leave the Hara and return to the village that they had previously occupied outside the city walls.[26] Also, during World War II, as a French protectorate Tunisia fell under the jurisdiction of the Vichy government, and remaining in the Hara became risky, so many of its inhabitants left.[27] Again, it is important to remember that the Jewish community chose to live there, chose to leave, and chose to return. It was their space, where they had their synagogues, their cemetery, their shops, their homes, their community. It is this lack of restriction that makes classifying the Hara as a heterotopia of deviation problematic. Although Jews could not own property until 1861, they could rent wherever they chose; the vast majority chose to rent in the Hara: “There was in fact segregation, but this segregation wasn’t without advantages: it allowed the Jewish way of life—customs and traditions—to develop without constraint; it inspired a feeling of security in a minority rightfully worried about being only a minority.”[28] The Hara fits neither of Foucault’s two categories of heterotopia. Conceived in crisis as a space of safety, it subsequently became a tool

for marking, and even controlling, religious deviation. Rather, the Hara is a hybrid, a space that both sheltered and restricted, controlled and liberated.

Foucault's second principle of heterotopia, that society can change or modify the function of a heterotopia over the course of time, is essentially a corollary of the first principle, at least as far as the Hara is concerned. We have already discussed the Hara's shift from a heterotopia of crisis to one of deviation. By the early twentieth century, the city of Tunis had developed a plan for renovating the Hara to make it more habitable.[29] The renovation was interrupted by the start of World War II, and after the war, in 1956, Tunisia gained its independence from France. By this time, the majority of Tunisian Jews were Westernized and the state of Israel had been established; when newly-independent Tunisia declared itself an Islamic republic, the Jewish community began emigrating, the wealthy to France, the poor to Israel. By the early 1960s, the city of Tunis had no qualms about destroying what remained of the Hara, since the few souls still living there would not mount a strong protest:

The families wanted to keep living in the Hara. Not only because they had their workshops or their stores, their livelihoods, there, but also because they would have been incapable of paying the high rents in the Ville franque; they also wanted to keep living there because the Jewish schools and benevolent organizations were in the Hara. Under these circumstances, the only satisfactory solution would have been to reconstruct, in the Hara itself, houses for those who had been forced to leave the ones they had. This is exactly what many organizations and civic groups called for. But the city didn't have the necessary funds.[30]

The subsequent emigration of the vast majority of Tunisia's Jewish community made the Hara, as a space of crisis or deviation, fundamentally unnecessary.

With the exodus from the Hara, its function changed for the Jewish community, shifting from being an external space to an internal one, as Albert Memmi explains:

By virtue of my life ever since, I've become a nomad, I have no roots, but, at the same time, I am solidly anchored. In some ways, the rest of my life—as a writer, at least—will be this sort of waking dream where, as another version of myself, I continue to live in the Hara, an imaginary Hara. [...] The Hara is my radium, my uranium 236, my inner sun, portable and inexhaustible. I am sure that it will continue shining in me until my death.[31]

Memmi's statement that the Hara is his "uranium 236" was published in 1976, a decade after the destruction of the Hara, and three years after the last sizeable emigration of

Tunisian Jews to Israel and France. Nevertheless, Memmi's evocation of the Hara throughout *La terre intérieure* underlines the importance of it in all his works. Just as the Hara shifts from external space in *La statue de sel* to internal sun in *La terre intérieure*, Benillouche's perception of it shifts in *La statue de sel*, illustrating Foucault's fourth principle of heterotopia. As we stated earlier, Memmi's depiction of the Hara in his first novel, *La statue de sel*, is in many ways more akin to that of a dystopia than that of a heterotopia. The Hara of *La statue de sel* does have the dimension of heterochrony, which Foucault lists as a characteristic of heterotopia, but for Benillouche, it is precisely this heterochrony that is perhaps the most difficult aspect of his life as a Touansa; trapped between the modern, Westernized world of the Grana that he contacts while at the Lycée Carnot, and the anachrony of his Touansa family, Benillouche lives between two times. Early in the first part of the novel, Benillouche tells us that his family lives on the edge of the Hara. His father was proud of being able to live outside of the ghetto, because that meant better living conditions for his family:

He evoked the unspeakable liquid in the gutters that gave off the fetid odor of butcher shops, greasy blandness of kitchen waters, and bleachy bitterness of wash waters; he described the mountains of garbage where the sun incubated swarms of green and black flies and cockroaches so large that they teetered on their spindly legs. Condescending, he deplored the one bathroom for several families. We only had one room but there was only one other family that shared our bathroom and our kitchen. And we enjoyed running water; we weren't forced to numb our fingers in the public fountain.[32]

This statement presents the first aspect of the Hara as dystopia. All accounts, fictional and non-fictional, of life in the Hara mention the squalor that reigned there:

The Hara offered the same spectacle from one end to the other: old buildings that served as tight lodgings for too many large families of limited resources. Their misery kept them from being able to maintain the buildings, so even the most well-built ones were inexorably transformed into horrifying slums rife with social problems: alcoholism, tuberculosis, ringworm, trachoma, infant mortality.[33]

In many accounts of life in the Hara, the squalor of it is the most striking aspect. The appalling conditions certainly affect Benillouche, but it is not this aspect of the Hara that holds sway over him. Although Benillouche was not born there, the Hara still influences him: His father has a shop there; Benillouche goes to elementary school there; the extended family lives there. So powerful is this influence, in fact, that in the second part of the novel, he announces:

My name is Mordekhai, Alexandre Benillouche. [...] I had no idea that I bore such a ridiculous, telling name. At the *lycée*, I became aware of it the first time roll was called. From then on, the mere mention of my name, which made my heart beat faster, embarrassed me. [...] Alexandre: trumpeting, glorious, was given to me by my parents in homage to the prestigious West. To them, it represented the image that they had of Europe. [...] Mordekhai, diminutive Mridakh, marked my participation in the Jewish tradition. It was the awe-inspiring name of a glorious Macchabee, as well as the name of my grandfather, a doddering old man who never forgot the horrors of the ghetto. If your name is Pierre or Jean and you change your clothes, you can change your apparent status as well. In this country, Mridakh is so stubbornly telling that it's the same thing as proclaiming, "I'm Jewish!" and more precisely, "I live in the Hara," "I'm an indigene," "My values are Oriental," "I'm poor." And I had learned to refuse these four things.[34]

Benillouche bears the Hara in his very name, and lives the heterochrony it contains as he moves between the two worlds that have become his. Not living in the official boundaries of the Hara does not spare him the effects of this heterochrony, since he is faced with it every day of his life. This is evident as Benillouche reinforces the idyllic qualities of the heterochronic worlds of his youth throughout the novel by way of contrasting images, continually presenting two incompatible times that he lives simultaneously. In the first part of the book the narrator describes an incident which characterizes the chronality of the Hara; his mother protects her children from the evil eye by using a spell to counter it: "Fierce, she came at us like a female whose young were being attacked, and, pretending to caress us, she passed her hand, wide open with all five fingers spread way apart, all the way down our bodies. Let's hope that the spell worked." [35] Within this account there is no rejection of the beliefs and customs present in the mother's reaction; the narrator is still one with the Hara and its time. In this period that predates the beginning of his studies at the *lycée*, Benillouche experiences no heterochrony. This situation changes dramatically by the end of the book, however, when Benillouche sees his mother participating in an exorcism ritual. As he watches her dance, he no longer identifies with her motions and gestures as he did when he was a child, but remains detached from and critical of the "spell" he once approved: "I kept repeating to myself: 'That's my mother, that's my mother, that's my mother,' as if the word could reestablish the connect, express all the affection that it should contain. But it refused to adapt itself to that barbaric figure in those bizarre clothes." [36] At this point the heterochrony of the Hara becomes evident as it forces Benillouche to move between the atavistic rites of his family, all the while confronting the modern age in which his classmates live, which proves to be just as alien to him:

They were part of the same civilization that remained theoretical for me because I wasn't familiar with it. In front of the gates of the school, they shook hands with each other civilly and cordially, then they exchanged news from an unknown planet.

---Did you hear Duke Ellington, Monte-Carlo 8:30?

I guessed that it had something to do with the radio, but I would have sooner killed myself than ask. Who was Duke Ellington? [...] More often than not, things were completely opaque for me. The separation of classes is as profound as that of religions and I wasn't one of them. They had exorbitant means and luxuries at their disposal, unheard of for me.[37]

It is the heterochronic aspect of the Hara that causes Benillouche to experience it as a dystopia. The traditional chronality of the Hara is irreconcilable with the modernity of the outside world, making it impossible for Benillouche to come to terms with his true self. This heterochrony is due to the postcolonial reality of the Hara.

In his work *Le discours maghrébin*, Robert Elbaz contends that Maghreb literature in French remains locked in a form of expression, French, that cannot fully express the Maghreb psyche. Just as Benillouche cannot reconcile the two times in which he exists, Maghreb literature in French is thwarted in its mission to liberate by the fact that the mission is conducted in the language of the colonizer.[38] The true difficulty that francophone literature of the Maghreb encounters is the same type of heterochrony that exists in the Hara; the past is dis-united from the present by colonialism. There is a disjunction of text and context that results in a culturally marginalized protagonist, because what this literature in general focuses on is the reconstitution of the mythical time before colonization:

The Maghrebian text suffers from an insurmountable contradiction, which is the vast difference in its signifying practice between the signifier and the signified: this text wants to (re)create the sheltered and confident world that preceded the colonial era, [...] but it does this precisely with the historic tools and the rational modes of expression that belong to the world of the colonizer. This insurmountable contradiction drives the Maghrebian process of production, at the same time that it menaces it.[39]

More than any of the other six principles of heterotopia, it is this fourth one, the one of heterochrony that marks Memmi's novel. Benillouche is in search of a mythical epoch before colonialism existed, an epoch that will allow him to be one with the Hara's chronality. The epoch is "mythical" because the existence of colonialism cannot be transcended. As long as he remains attached to both the Hara and the *lycée*, Benillouche will be trapped in the heterochrony of trying to exist in two irreconcilable

times. This results in the creation of an unbearable dystopia, the opposite of Foucault's heterotopia. The fundamental untenability of Benillouche's situation causes him to seek the only recourse possible: Since there is no way for him to counteract the psychic effects of the heterochrony, he leaves Tunis, thus distancing himself from the historic dystopia that he cannot resolve.

Memmi's work illustrates Foucault's fourth principle of heterotopia, the heterochrony, but in a way that is more dystopic. In *Les belles de Tunis*, the element of heterochrony does not play the crucial role that it does in *La statue de sel*, and it is because of this, perhaps, that Moati's work comes closer to depicting Foucault's notion of "a real utopia that really exists." The city of Tunis itself could be cited as an example of the third principle of heterotopia, or the juxtaposition of places that are inherently incompatible, but it is the Hara of Moati's novel that accomplishes this. Of course, it is not the places themselves that are brought together, but rather their representatives. Although she is born in the Hara, Myriam, the first protagonist, has a powerful uncle who is advisor to the Bey, the Ottoman ruler of Tunis. Myriam is her Uncle Nessim's adopted child, since he and his wife cannot have children; Myriam's mother dies in childbirth and her father is an alcoholic, so it is Nessim who provides for her during her childhood in the Hara. Through Nessim, Myriam establishes ties with all of the forces at work in Tunis. She becomes friends with the princess Kalthoum, wife of the Bey's regent; she is on good terms with the Bey's wife; she becomes adopted by a Grana couple; and she has Italian and Maltese friends. Through these relationships, Myriam links the wealth and power of the foreign consuls and of the rulers of Tunis with the Hara. Furthermore, in the *oukala*[40] where she's born and grows up, all of the nationalities that meet and cross in Tunis live in harmony. Jews, Muslims, and Europeans share the tight quarters of the *oukala*, illustrating Foucault's concept of the heterotopia as an idealized version of society. This illustration is reinforced by Moati's juxtaposition of this peaceful, multi-ethnic coexistence with the emulous political intrigue that exists in Tunis' halls of power. If Myriam's Hara represents unity, the Ville franque represents rivalry; Moati describes how the British, French, and Ottoman consuls vie for power and influence, each manipulating the indigenous Muslim and Jewish populations to garner support. Myriam also becomes an unofficial liaison between the Grana and the Touansa when, upon her Uncle Nessim's hasty departure from Tunis, she is adopted by Eugenia Enriquez and her husband, two socially progressive Grana. Eugenia teaches Myriam how to read and write, and instructs her in the ways of European society. The novel evokes the prior contrast of the factious, pugnacious European world and the integrated, harmonious world of the Hara again when Luigia Mussali (La Mussali), an Italian *intrigante*, and Guido Montfiore, Eugenia's Grana nephew, plot against Myriam, the Touansa *parvenue*, in the hopes of obtaining the fortune that she is set to inherit from her Uncle Nessim. Before his death, Nessim embezzled millions from the treasury of Tunis, and then fled to Italy. When Eugenia adopted Myriam, La Mussali accused her of trying to gain access to Nessim's fortune. Eugenia was about to be expelled from Tunis, but Myriam's close ties to the Beya prevent the deportation, and restore Eugenia's reputation. La Mussali continues plotting against Myriam, who is now considered the *intrigante*'s rival, and urges Guido Montfiore to marry Myriam. The Enriquez oppose the marriage because they suspect

Guido's motives, as Eugenia explains to Myriam: "My dear, don't be angry with me, I beg you. I only want your happiness. I know the world better than you do, and I know that you will be unhappy with [Guido], that he'll make a fool out of you. In spite of the education I've given you, in spite of your money, believe me: for them, for all those pretentious people, you'll only ever be Little Myriam from the Hara." [41]

It is in Eugenia's words to Myriam that we find Foucault's fifth principle of heterotopia, which posits the exclusivity of heterotopic space. The Hara isolates the Touansa socially and economically, but it remains impenetrable to others. At several points, Moati describes how the Hara, a seemingly open space, is closed off to outsiders. When an angry mob wants to attack the Hara, it is stopped at the very entrance to the neighborhood: "The crowd crying for vengeance spread out in the Hara, at the foot of the Medina. The unfortunate inhabitants had only the time to barricade themselves in their *oukalas*. Luckily, the narrowness of the sordid streets, where nauseating water stagnated, prevented the protestors from regrouping." [42] Later on, after Myriam and her husband, Mochée, have moved out of the Hara, they return to show it to their daughter, Maya. Even though Maya is Touansa, she must be guided in the Hara; she does not penetrate the neighborhood on her own. This impenetrability is not without its consequences, however. The squalor that reigns in the Hara is due in part to the fact that the area is not easily accessible, as Eugenia Enriquez finds when she first ventures there:

With each step, Eugenia twisted her ankles in the crevasses of the sidewalk, despite [Pepe's] helpful hand. In these same narrow streets, untouched by a single ray of sunlight, the Italian, oppressed, was having a hard time breathing. The walls, high as fortresses, were cracking in many places, when they weren't already half ruined. The doors were nothing but rough planks, often full of holes, equipped with rings for knockers. Topped off by latticed or round windows, they granted access, at the top of narrow, lopsided stairs, to miserable houses. As they entered further into this sinister maze that gave off an odor of dead fish and rats, Eugenia, on the edge of nausea, hurried her steps. [43]

Life in the Hara has its difficulties for Myriam. The squalor makes her gravely ill, and she almost dies before Eugenia rescues her. Being a ward of the Enriquez opens up many doors for the young girl, except for one: Because she was born in the Hara, Myriam is excluded from the Grana society of which her adoptive parents are a part. When Eugenia attempts to organize play dates for Myriam with her niece, for example, Eugenia's sister reacts with violent disapproval:

[...] She's a child of savages! What are these Oriental Jews? Savages, barbarians! Berbers, even! No manners, no education. They are dirty, uncouth, illiterate,

repugnant... My God! when I think that we're supposed to have the same religion as they do! We do our best to have nothing in common with them: not the same neighborhood, nor the same synagogue, nor the same butcher, nor the same laws, not even the same cemetery...And you? You, Mrs. Enriquez, sister-in-law of the Montfiore, you bring these people into your home! [44]

Myriam's birth as a Touansa closes the world of the Grana to her forever; this discrimination survives and affects the second generation, Myriam's daughter, Maya, when she meets Serge Silvera, a Grana whose mother will not allow the couple to marry because Maya is Touansa. These exclusionary aspects of the Hara are not uncommon in representations of the city, since urban space often becomes an obstacle to some protagonists, acting as a hostile zone in which they begin to question their own identity:

The relationship of the hero to the space seems to be divisible into three categories: suffered, coveted, dominated. Space isn't experienced in terms of esthetics, but in terms of power. Most often, the character is in conflict with his own living space, which oppresses or demeans him. He can either passively accept his destiny, or choose to flee, in search of a better world. [45]

What is striking in the case of the Hara, however, is the difference in the effects that it has on Memmi and Moati's protagonists. As we have seen, just as the space of the Hara is malevolent for Benillouche, causing him to flee Tunis, it is benevolent for Myriam. In true utopic fashion, even the isolating qualities of the Hara prove fortunate for Myriam. Grana society shuns her, so upon the death of the Enriquez, she must return to the Hara. Had she stayed in the Ville franque, she would have married her cousin, Guido Montfiore, a notorious good-for-nothing who, as we have seen, only wanted Myriam for the fortune he assumed she had. By being forced to return to the Hara, Myriam weds Mochée, her childhood playmate from the *oukala*. The union is extremely propitious, as the couple is well matched, and soon opens schools to educate the children of the Hara.

When Foucault introduces the idea of heterotopia, he does so with this caveat: "But, of course, heterotopias take on varied forms, and perhaps one cannot find one sole form of heterotopia that is universal." [46] As we have seen in the case of the Hara, one fixed space is capable of shifting its role of heterotopia, while still meeting the six principles that Foucault sets down. This occurs, in part, because of the very nature of the Hara itself; established in crisis, the Hara could not possibly continue to fulfill the same functions with the frequent change in colonial powers administering Tunisia. The very nature of politics in Tunis made the Hara as heterotopia a hybrid, simultaneously one of crisis and deviation. This inherent hybridity is reflected in the function that the Hara fulfills in the works of Albert Memmi and Nine Moati. In *La statue de sel*, the

representation of the Hara illustrates Foucault's first, second, fourth, fifth, and sixth principles of heterotopia, yet is not an example of a "real utopia that really exists." Benillouche's experience of the Hara is too strongly influenced by the space's heterochrony; the chronality of the Hara, and the historic mistime that it represents vis-à-vis the modern world of the *lycée* create an untenable situation for Benillouche. Incapable of resolving his own identity within the context of the Hara's heterochrony, departure becomes the only possibility for him. Rather than a heterotopia that is a "real utopia that really exists," Benillouche experiences the Hara of *La statue de sel* as an antagonistic heterotopia, or a dystopia. In *Les belles de Tunis*, Myriam's experience of the Hara is almost exactly the opposite of Benillouche's. Moati's depiction of the ghetto fulfills almost all of the same principles of heterotopia that Memmi's does, except for one. Where Memmi's work is heavily influenced by the fourth principle, that of heterochrony, Moati's representation is marked by the third principle, or the juxtaposition of inherently incompatible places. Myriam, and by extension the Hara, becomes the link between the Muslim, Touansa, Grana, and European societies that coexist in Tunis. Moati shows her readers the intrigue and rivalry that consumes the politically powerful circles of the city, positing it in sharp contrast to the harmonious, multi-ethnic solidarity of the Hara, a "real utopia that really exists." These two distinct representations of the same space, the Hara, highlight the characteristics that make it a heterotopia, and confirm Foucault's caveat that no absolute heterotopia exists.

Notes

[1] Michel Foucault, “Des espaces autres” Dits et écrits, eds. Daniel Defert and François Ewald, vol. IV (Paris: Gallimard, 1994) 753.

[2] All translations are my own.

[3] Foucault 753.

[4] Foucault 754.

[5] Florence Paravy, L'espace dans le roman africain francophone contemporain (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1999) 41.

[6] Ceri Peach, “The Ghetto and the Ethnic Enclave,” Desegregating the City: Ghettos, Enclaves, and Inequality, ed. David P. Varady (Albany: SUNY Press, 2005) 35.

[7] Paul Sebag, Histoire des Juifs de Tunisie (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1991) 91-92.

[8] Sebag, Histoire 119.

[9] Sebag, Histoire 148.

[10] It is important to remember that the percentage of the Jewish population that was Westernized was very small. On the preceding page(147), Sebag tells us that : “Westernized Jews were becoming more and more numerous among the newer generations. But, within the larger Jewish population, they were still a minority. Those who were born before the [French] Protectorate, to whom one must add all of those who hadn't been able to go far in their studies, continued to speak the Judeo-Arabic [dialect], while staying attached to their traditional culture.”

[11] Sebag, Histoire 146.

[12] Albert Memmi, La libération du Juif (Paris: Gallimard, 1966) 110-111.

[13] Foucault 755-756. Throughout the text we have kept Foucault's neologism of "heterotopia," in order to distinguish it from the evolutionary and biological term, "heterotopy." In the same fashion, we employ "heterochrony," which is the standard translation of Foucault's "hétérochronie."

[14] Foucault 757-761.

[15] Foucault 755.

[16] In both of Sebag's works that this study cites, he refers to this legend, but does not include the precision that a "hara" of families be allowed in; in neither work does he consider the origins of the name "hara."

[17] Paul Sebag, L'évolution d'un ghetto nord-africain: La Hara de Tunis (Paris: PUF, 1959) 9.

[18] Abdelaziz Daouletli, et. al. "Les opérations intégrées de restructuration urbaine: l'exemple de la Médina de Tunis," Momentum, 25.4(1982) 262.

[19] Foucault 756-757.

[20] Sebag, Histoire 57.

[21] Foucault 757.

[22] Sebag, Histoire 67.

[23] Jean-Paul Sartre, Réflexions sur la question juive (Paris: Gallimard, 1954) 88.

[24] Foucault 756-757.

[25] Sebag, L'évolution 13.

[26] Sebag, Histoire 68.

[27] Sebag, Histoire 238.

[28] Sebag, L'évolution 11.

- [29] Sebag, L'évolution 26.
- [30] Sebag, L'évolution 27.
- [31] Albert Memmi, La terre intérieure (Paris: Gallimard, 1976) 71.
- [32] Albert Memmi, La statue de sel (Paris: Folio-Gallimard, 1991) 33-34.
- [33] Sebag, L'évolution 26.
- [34] Memmi, La statue 107-108.
- [35] Memmi, La statue 23.
- [36] Memmi, La statue 180.
- [37] Memmi, La statue 120-121.
- [38] Robert Elbaz, Le discours maghrébin, dynamique textuelle chez Albert Memmi (Longueuil, PQ: Le préambule, 1988) 13.
- [39] Elbaz 19.
- [40] *Oukala* were typical constructions in the Hara, consisting of several stories of rooms built around an open courtyard. Typically, one family lived in each room, and there was one ground-floor kitchen and one ground-floor bathroom that all of the residents shared.
- [41] Nine Moati, Les belles de Tunis (Tunis: Cérès, 2004) 185.
- [42] Moati 16.
- [43] Moati 132.
- [44] Moati 153.
- [45] Paravy 42.
- [46] Foucault 756.

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